

Rabbi Lewis' Message for May, 2010

Today was a day full of sacred moments. When I was rehearsing in the sanctuary with a bar mitzvah family, one of the family members noticed the door handles on the ark. They are in the shape of fists. Was there any particular religious meaning to the fists, he asked. I said, no, as far as I know, there is no religious meaning to fists. If the hands were open and if there were a split between the four longer fingers, that would signify the way the *cohanim* open their hands for the priestly benediction. These fists are just functional. I had never paid them much attention. In fact, until the questioner had pointed it out, I hadn't realized both fists are right-handed.

I do know who created these fists. They were crafted by Matty Schneider. He was a founding member of the temple who died about ten years ago. He also created the ark and was responsible for much of the woodwork on the bimah. If you look closely at the small tarnished plaques below the ark, you will see that Matty made it in memory of his son Larry who died many years ago when he was in his twenties.

In moments like that, I am reminded to be grateful to those who came before us at the Jewish Center. There were others whose contribution is not memorialized by a plaque but whose efforts were also important and from whose work we benefit today. When I look down from the bimah on the row of 6th and 7th graders sitting up front during services, I know that they are the legacy of Matty and all those others who worked hard to establish this congregation. Whenever we do something to create community in our congregation, we honor their memories. I was grateful that the question about the door handles had reminded me to feel appreciative of something I often take for granted.

Later in the morning, my 6th and 7th graders talked about the meaning of minyan. We said that the minimum definition of community is ten. If you can't get at least ten people for prayer, you are not permitted to recite certain prayers. The idea is that we are obligated to do at least that much if we want the privilege of reciting kaddish. I reminded them that when they are 13, they, too, can receive a phone call asking them to be part of a minyan enabling someone else to say kaddish. There happened to be ten students present in that class today; right there in our classroom, our small microcosmic Jewish community, they understood that each one's presence counted.

Then in the Confirmation rehearsal, a student who had been unable to read Hebrew 6 months ago stood in front of the Torah and began to read. One of her classmates had been tutoring her. It was what I call a *shehechianu* moment, a moment deserving of celebration.

Creating community is hard work, but every now and then, you have a morning where you remember why you do what you do. When I march in the processional to see [Student Cantor Coyot](#) invested as a Cantor, that will be another sacred moment. I realized almost incidentally that this year will mark 30 years since I was ordained a Rabbi. I have been fortunate since then to experience many sacred moments, most of them small ones like the ones I described today, ones that would not be worthy of headlines but in fact are worth so much more.

May we share many more sacred moments together.

Rabbi Ellen J. Lewis